217

Kamban's Kosala

T. N. SESHACHALAM

K965

O-,1FKA,K
N24
48212

Kamban's Kosala

OR

A Poet's Plea for Culture

BY

T. N. SESHACHALAM

WITH A FOREWORD

BY

Dr. JAMES H. COUSINS

1-SEP 1924

MADRAS

R. K. RAJAGOPALACHARI AND CO.

1924

All Rights Reserved] [*Price Rs. 1-4.*

Copyright to
T. N. Seshachalam

Printed by Messrs. R. K. Rajagopalachari & Co.,
at their "Kalanilayam Press,"
23, Govindappa Naick St., G.T., Madras.

FOREWORD.

THIS book, small in physical bulk, is of large significance, for it is indicative of a growing movement in India today that is of the utmost importance not only to India but to humanity. That movement on the artistic side, is concerning itself with the bringing forth of the treasures of Indian inspiration and literary expression from the past, and in the contemporary revival of vernacular literary creation which a false system of modern education had almost succeeded in destroying. On the religious and philosophical side (or, to put it correctly, from the traditional Indian point of view, the religio-philosophical, since both are one) the movement is making exposition of the principles of *Eternal Truth* that have since time immemorial, stirred the heart and mind of India to expression not only in the significant one-sentence ejaculations of the saints and seers but in vast philosophical systems.

Something of both sides of this movement for the revealing of the true India, and her message of spiritual medicine for human ills, is touched on in this book: for its subject is not only a literary entity in the form of a poem, but an artistic expression that arises

out of India's age-long concept of the *Divine Unity* atomising *Itself* in human and natural diversity. Here we have but an introduction to the Tamil poet's version of the immortal spiritual epic of "The Ramayanam," a version which is not merely a version but a distinctive creation of personal and national genius. Those who find, as I do, a special pleasure in the contemplation of works that combine the cultural expression of the ancient world and the commentary of its legitimate succession in the modern world, will look forword to the subsequent books of the series—with perhaps a hope that the ancient may be given greater space.

JAMES H. COUSINS

PREFACE

THIS little book is ambitious. Taken by itself it hopes to interpret an ancient seer-poet's judgment on the conflict that is now rampant on all sides between conservative harangues and socialistic utopias. But its main purpose is to introduce to the world of thought and letters, the great Kamba Ramayanam, an extraordinary work of art and book on life, but which would be perplexing to all the western methods of analysis and reasoning.

About Kamban, as with many other great personalities, much is not known beyond his works. He lived nearly ten centuries ago and was accepted as the greatest among the poets of his time. The Ramayana which he composed has not been surpassed by anything in the epic literature of the Tamil land. The magnificient classics of the earlier academicians were all his heritage, and his imagination and native genius were considerably assisted by his scholarship. The hoary literatures and philosophy of India alone could have cradled such a genuis, a genius highly poetical, pre-eminently moral, transcendental by the inspired revelations of its seer's ecstasy and best formed to clarify the elemental Truths of life here and hereafter.

Kamban professes Valmiki's Sanskrit epic of the same name as the original for his Ramayanam. But this is almost akin to Shakespeare's indebtedness to Boccacio or Plutarch. Kamban's Ramayanam is the embodiment of a mind, the most creative that ever engaged in the exact portrayal of the details of actual existence, in the dazzling speculations of life among the gods and in the profound complications of passions, human and superhuman. The eternal story of Rama runs in crystal stream of forty two thousand three hundred and forty eight lines of sublime grandeur glorifying the Creator and reflecting His creation.

With the Kural and the Gita, the Ramayanam is the most ennobling book that has ever been written. Like many other good things, however, it is not generally understood and made sufficient part of one's being. The realization of the conception of life, individual and social, that gathers and takes shape in one's mind as this wounderful epic is read and re-read ought to recast the destiny of mankind.

T. N. S.

THE RIVER

Kamban's Kosala

CHAPTER I

The River.

KAMBAN, in accordance with the well established canons of Tamil poetry, begins his great epic the **Ramayanam** with a description of the river Sarayu which flows through the kingdom of Kosala and on whose bank stands the city of Ayodhia, the seat and citadel of the solar race of far-famed kings. In an age and country in which agriculture was the primary occupation of the nation, it is but natural that the rivers, contributing as they do in no little measure to the prosperity of the people, should, in all its literature, be accorded this premier place of honour. Several poets have, before and after Kamban, sung charming verses on rivers; but we miss in them all the systematic treatment, the artistic

selection and the picturesque delineation that characterise Kamban's version of the subject. The formation of the winter clouds—the clouds gathering on the mountain tops—the mountain slopes receiving the monsoon showers—the showers gathering into great floods—the great floods rushing down the valleys in rapid torrents—the majestic march along the level tracts through forest field and farm—the capillary-wise network of ramifications—the sluggish course in slender streams on the sandy sea-shore—the final fall and the disappearance into the mighty main, these are the several and successive stages of a river and Kamban has scarcely left any of them untouched and unadorned: but, what more, over these common, almost commonplace, phenomena the poet throws the magic mantle of his imagination, and illuminating every step with splendid imagery, illustrating every occurrence with striking similies, inculcating sublime truths everywhere, holds his audience spell-bound over the fortunes of a familiar river.

Let us commemorate the glories of the river (Sarayu) which adorns the kingdom of Kosala, a land where neither the mischief provoking arrows of the five senses (of the people) nor the tumultuous darts of jewel-breasted maidens' eyes, deviate from the path of Dharma.

So opens the fist canto. The errors of the five senses are the root of all evils in this world and in Kosala, Kamban tells us at the very outset, the people have their senses straight under their control. The immaculate morality obtaining in the land is thereby brought out, and in particular, Kamban contemplates the absolute purity of the sexes. The men are all chaste and so are the women, declares Kamban: but this declaration may not, at first sight, appear to have any ostensible connection with the theme on hand. A little examination is all that is needed to clear this. The ultimate origin of the river is apparently in the clouds and that is where most poets begin: but Kamban is thorough and begins at the very beginning of things. He tells us that the condition indispensable for the formation of the clouds existed in the land. That, is the chastity of women whose one of the very potent virtues, is the influence they possess over the seasonal rains. Sage THIRUVALLUVAR only voices this grand faith when he laid down in his incomparable couplets that "the rain would pour at the bidding of her who worships even no God but her husband." *Silappathikaram,* a Tamil classic of a very great antiquity also proclaims that **"in that happy clime where chaste women dwell, the rains**

nor the crops would ever fail: the king's victorious arms never know defeat."

A prominent mention of the spotless chastity of women comes in as the necessary basis for the rains and, therefore, forms a very natural introduction to the inception of the river. A question may yet arise why after stating that the five senses of the people of Kosala do not deviate from their proper path, the eyes alone of women should be made a special mention of, as not deviating also. It cannot certainly be taken to indicate that the errors of the other senses in them stand condoned. However, when we know that ogling eyes are the fastest snares to the stoutest hearts, and remember also that sages like Viswamithra, a dauntless master of himself, had succumbed to the onslaught of Menaka, the question is answered. Kamban takes, thus, all possible precautions and makes it known once for all that in Kosala men were in themselves virtuous and the irresistable source of temptation was also essentially innocent,—the effect being the appearance of winter clouds at the appointed seasons; which is described in the next stanza.

The ash-besmeared-Siva-coloured clouds went adorning the way, grazed the ocean, and returned of the colour of Him (Vishnu) whose form is radiant with the splendor of Lakshmi of sandal-pasted breast

The white summer clouds are said to go like God Siva and return like God Vishnu. God Siva, though his colour is that of fire, has his body smeared with ashes and underneath the ashy whitness a tinge of red would always be visible. So are the summer clouds, ashy, not absolute white with a light tinge of red. Vishnu's complexion is deep dark as that of the winter clouds, but Vishnu is described as enshrining Lakshmi in his chest and Lakshmi again has her breast coated with sandal paste. Kamban's use of epithets is a rapturous study in itself. They come in to amplify the comparison and not merely to satisfy the exigencies of the metre. The appropriateness of describing Siva has been pointed out. Vishnu's Lakshmi is intended to stand for the lightning that would appear in amongst the water-laden clouds; for, women for their slender form and sparkling brilliance are often compared in Tamil literature to streaks of lightning. And Tamil literature has again a favourite conceit. A delightful fragrance would usually be reported to pervade the atmosphere after a shower, which the poets trace to the balmy fumes the high class ladies employ in drying their hair, which ascending to the skies get deposited in the clouds and are expected to descend with the rains. The sandal paste on Lakshmi's breast is intended probably to supply this perfume.

Kamban's similies would admit of a good deal of drawing out and expanding, not only when scrutinising the details as has just been shown, but in the very idea itself. The alchemy of such a versatile genius could scarcely form anything but what is ductile and malleable. This could not be better substantiated than by pointing out where Kamban's imitators fail. Now, as we had said before Kamban was the only poet who established the basis for the seasonal rains, so is he the first to describe the transformation of the white summer clouds to the heavy dark winter clouds. There is scarcely a Tamil poet or poetaster, since Kamban who has not canvassed this idea. KACHIAPPASIVACHARIAR in his *Skanda Puranam* compares the white clouds to the sea of milk, and the dark ones to the salt-blue sea. VEERAKAVIRAYAR, the author of *Harischandra Puranam*, would have the white clouds resemble the divine nectar and the dark clouds, the destructive venom that came from the sea. In *Naidatham* written by ATHIVEERARAMAPANDIAN the white clouds go like Saraswathi and return dark like Parvathi. Indra's elephant Iravadam before and after Durvasa's curse is made to stand by KACHIAPPA MUNIVAR for his white and dark clouds. The snowclad Himalayas and the dark-blue Nilgiris have been pressed into service by MEENAKSHISUNDARAM PILLAI, a

very recent poet, to represent his white and dark clouds. According to PARANJOTHI MUNIVER the white clouds go like the ash-besmeared God (a direct borrowing from Kamban) and come back water-laden like His consort Parvathi. Many more instances may be quoted, but all these writers, except perhaps, in a way, the last mentioned, have altogether overlooked the essence of Kamban's comparison. However, the change in colour is only a superficial incident. Kamban's similies have a sequel, and when drawn out would not land in the quagmire of absurdities. Siva is the God of destruction and Vishnu is the Protector who feeds life and fosters it. Summer clouds parch up life and it is the winter clouds that shower blessings on humanity. Kamban's comparison is appropriate then not only from the point of view of form but also from the point of view of function. There is yet a deeper significance in it. Clouds white or dark, differ though they may in form or function, are essentially one and the same. What is Siva and Vishnu, with all their differences of form and function but the dual manifestations of the one Deity?

An application of this test of logical sequel to the comparisons used by the other poets mentioned above, would give us shallow and even ludicrous results sometimes. The comparison of the two mountains in MEENAKSHI-

SUNDARAM PILLAY or of the two seas in *Skanda puranam* or of Saraswathi and Parvathi in ATHIVEERARAMA PANDYAN'S *Naidatham* denotes merely a change in colour but is otherwise painfully colourless, absolutely innocent of a sequel besides. Identifying the rain-bearing clouds with Indra's elephant returning with a curse is inauspicious in its conception, while comparing the summer clouds to life-giving nectar and the life-fostering winter clouds to the all destroying venom is not only inauspicious but also obviously a functional confusion. PARANJOTHI MUNIVAR alone approaches Kamban in this anywhere near, but he commits, in a way, a '*half sale*' plagiarism. He too uses "ash besmeared Siva" for his white clouds while Parvathi, the embodiment of Energy and the benevolent Mother of the universe fits in very well with the winter clouds. No doubt, there is functional appropriateness in this comparison, but the idea of Kamban's unity is altogether lost sight of.

The clouds having formed they gather on the mountain tops.

> *The clouds spreading to gather on the mountain tops, appeared as though the ocean feeling that his adorable father-in-law would be warm, rose to bathe him.*

The clouds rising in the horizon in a mass contiguous with the sea would very naturally

suggest the sea itself rising, and since the clouds waft towards the inland mountain the sea may be easily said to come to bathe it: and the sea comes to bathe the mountain because of the affectionate relationship established, by the poet, between them as arising out of the circumstance that the daughter River, born of mountains weds with ocean.

Genius is bold; we have known pathetic fallacies where inanimate nature is represented as feeling for the animate; but our Kamban makes one form of inanimate nature feel for an other—a sort of pathetic fallacy, as it were, twice removed.

> *The clouds yielded showers—which presented the appearance of the Celestials letting down strings of silver to lift the golden mountain up—as profusely as those men of unlimited liberality who recollect and gladly give all what they have away.*

Genius is bold not only in conception, as we took occasion to show before but also in innovation. In the use of similies, the obvious is quoted to illustrate what is less familiar. Kamban very often inverses the process and with very effective results. The cloud is the traditional emblem of unlimited liberality—liberality to the extent of self-annihilation, expectant of no recompense. It would be the usual order, therefore, to call in the cloud to illustrate

the generosity of a given person, and not a generous person to illustrate the cloud's pouring down the rain. The peculiarity of the Indian conception of charity lies in its unlimitedness. A calculation as to how much or how little one could afford to give has no place in it; one has got only to recollect the total extent of one's belongings so that all may be given away and nothing left. KING CHIBI, of yore, cut and gave a portion of his own flesh as compensation to a hunter, for a pigeon which he chased and which took refuge in the king. Raku, the ancestor of Rama, resigned all his wives in favour of a Brahmin who evinced a desire for one of them; conferred his kingdom on him for their support and withal exchanged his chances of Heaven for that man's sins, to save the fond fellow from the beggar's hell. HARISCHANDRA lost his kingdom and sold as slaves his queen and his prince, all to please the whimsical Viswamithra. MAHABALI granted the mortal boon of deceptive Vamana, when he knew that his destruction was inevitable thereupon, and gloried over the gift. KARNA, promised away the fruits of all his meritorious deeds, and with that his life, to Krishna and pledged the gift with his own blood, These are among the monuments of Indian liberality who annihilate themselves if necessary in the giving, and it is no less than such as these that

Kamban would invoke to illustrate the raining of a cloud.

We endeavoured to show how Kamban's imitators flounder when they borrow from him, and just a passing note may be made here how Kamban improves what he borrows. The showers in themselves are spoken of as strings of silver which the celestials are supposed to let down for the purpose of lifting up the mountain, because they think it was made of gold. This idea is taken from '*Jeevaka Chinthamani*,' where THIRUTHAKA DEVAR in describing the rainfall; compares it to silver poles sticking up skywards from the mountain. The rain has nearer resemblance to silver strings than to silver poles, and falling showers would sooner suggest the letting down of strings rather than the sticking up of poles.

The rainwater would next multiply into vast floods.

> *Like the fame of the cool canopied king (Dasaratha) who in the path of honour and righteousness walks in the ways of Manu; and like the alms bestowed on the hands of the sages, learned in the four Vedas, the waters multiplied and spread in abundant floods.*

Here again is an instance of Kamban's trick of inverse comparisons. The gathering and spreading of the water after a rain is nothing out of the ordinary and there would be no

point in mentioning it, if it were not for expounding something which might not be quite so obvious. That Dasaratha's fame spread far and wide is a fact that Kamban may like to tell us, and that the alms given to the deserving multiply in usefulness in the hands of the receiver is not a truth which all could have realised without being told. Kamban utilises the natural flow of water as an occasion for doing both.

The waters that so gather and multiply rush down in torrents carrying all the products of the mountain with it in a great haste,

> *The haste of a harlot who having abstracted all she could lay her hands upon departs from her paramour.*

The river is now formed at the foot of the hill. Classic Tamil classifies a country into four kinds of lands, viz., Kurinji (the hilly region); Mullai (the pasture-land); Marutham (the agricultural area) and Naithal, (the sea-coast). The course of the river through all these lands is described by Kamban and the description consists mainly in ascribing different attributes to it at its different stages. In its hasty descent down the mountain with all its products the river, we saw, behaved like a harlot. The products referred to are, we are told in the next stanza, precious stones and gold. peacock feather and ornaments, sandal wood and ivory and since these are articles of merchandise and the river carries them about she is said to

resemble a caravan of traders. Then again, the flowers and pollen, gold, dust and honey that float on the surface, give it the variegated appearance of the rainbow. The advance of the stream plucking at the leaves and branches on its either side imitates not a little the mischief of a pack of monkeys in progress. Kamban draws points of similarity between the river and a drunkard—both have broken their bounds, an unnatural buoyance characterises both, and the interior of either is in a state of muddle.

From Kurinji the river goes to Mullai, the land of the shepherds. There the river marches sporting like Sri Krishna rolling down the dairy products and running away with shepherdesses' clothes. Mullai to Marutham the entry is boisterous like the strides of a wild elephant pulling down all that lie in its way. Here it divides into smaller and smaller streams like the branching of a geneological tree, ending at last severally in the sea.

So much for the river at its different stages; while taken as a whole it stands for the **Law of Karma**, whose attribute is the constant conversion of one form of life to another. The counterpart of this office in the river is seen when it washes down the special produce of Kurinji and deposits it in Mullai, that of Mullai in Marutham and Marutham's products in Naithal, and so keeps changing one kind of land to another.

If the quantity and the conduct of the river had

received so much of the poet's attention, its quality has not been left unmentioned either. The Sarayu's water, says Kamban, unintermittent like the virtuous practice of the solar race of kings, nourished like the mother's milk every form of life. There is not a place, be it the grove or the jungle, the tank or the desert, the forest or the field which has not been traversed by its waters, which omnipresence is quite concrete and needs mere telling to be understood; but Kamban, as usual has made it stand sponsor for the enunciation of a grand truth. The water pervaded every place just as life pervades every form of body known to science. The significance of this comparison again is imbedded in its sequel. The water wherever found is only the water of the Sarayu and a particle of it. Similarly, Kamban wants us to realise that the lives that are manifest in different forms of existence are not independent entities but only the separated particles of the one Life Principle. Transcendental genius levels distinctions and digests the unity that underlies the apparent diversities. It is the one life that is seen in man, animal or plant, irrespective of the body which it is made to inhabit by force of Karma: Kamban wishes us to remember, and sing to the strain of Robert Burns with a wider breath, for ever, that

For a' that, an' a' that.
Life is a life for a' that.

And lastly, Kamban ends the river as he began it—with the reiteration of a profound truth. The idea of the unity of Deity that lay latent in the comparison of the clouds at the very origin of the river is fully developed in the stanza that describes its amalgamation with the sea. If Kamban looked askance at sectarian disputes before, he discountenances here the bigotry of the religions. If it was only the water of the river Sarayu that pervades all the tanks, pools and ponds in the country, it is again only the water of the same ocean that prevades all the rivers of the world. The waters of the ocean taking its birth from different mountains, traverse different parts with diverse names and incidents as rivers, and come back to the same ocean; this, points out the seer, is exactly the nature of the Supreme Unknown and Unknowable that is claimed by all the great religions as their exclusive Deity. There is no ambiguity about the comparison. The inference is patent. The great religions of the world, though they take their source from different individuals, by whatever name their course is called, however different in their cult, still they all tend towards the realisation of one and the same Fountain Head of Salvation. "Religious preachers set at rest your differences therefore" exhorts Kamban, "and preach the universal religion."

The River Sarayu stands for this marvellous catholicity to Kamban. Adversity may, but genius always does read sermons in running brooks.

THE COUNTRY

CHAPTER II

The Country.

IN the preceding chapter an endeavour has been made to show how Kamban systematizes a theme which other poets handle in a more or less, desultory manner. The same authors however, when they proceed to speak of the country, they take us, step by step, through a series of events in a regular order. They all narrate faithfully the successive stages of cultivation interspersing good, bad and indifferent sort of figures and figurative imageries, but the method is stereotyped. Their treatment of the subject, in bare outline, would involve the ryots celebrating the inception of the floods with drinking bouts—their singing for joy—their going to the fields and yoking the cattle—ploughing the soil—the sowing, sprouting and transplantation—the weeding—the crops putting forth ears of corn—the ears standing stiff and bending low before and after the setting in of grain—the reaping, sheafing, threshing and the winnowing of the paddy—the carting of the produce home, where the

ryots pay the king's share, share it with the poor and entertain their guests and relations in sumptuous feast and mirth. Kamban sets about the matter in quite a different manner. He, along with all the poets, emphasises the profuse hospitality as the key-note of the country. But there is an important divergence between Kamban on the one hand and the rest on the other in their respective appreciation of **cause and effect.** The impression that is left in us after surveying the *country* life in other works, would be that the people are hospitable because they have so much to give. Kamban would have us conceive that really the characteristic hospitality of the people is the cause of the plenteous prosperity. Hospitality is service to humanity, and if Kamban reiterates one idea more than another, it is this, *viz.*, **service** is the highest good in itself and the cause of all that is good besides. This sublime truth is deduced by a process that is very subtle. Aggressive didactics could not, by any means, be laid to Kamban's charge. The artist, in his consummate skill, induces this impression in us by a masterly process of selection. There is no mention of any incident or event in his version, that would indicate the least form of violence or effort. Whatever that people get is Nature's free and spontaneous gift and the country needs no *tapping.* Therefore all the stages of cultivation are dispensed with or, at best, disposed of with

a remote suggestion. Kamban's picture of the country is essentially static. He tells us rather how Nature and people are and not so much how they came that to be. Kosala, like a cornucopia showers peace, plenty and prosperity on her children. There it is, the people have only to collect and not to make. "The peasants," says Kamban in a stanza.

The peasants collect what are in the fields,
in the groves, on the trees and in the mines,
like the bees gathering honey from flowers.

If the peasants were industrious, it was only the industry of the bee;—gathering only what is sweet, gathering what they have not produced and gathering primarily for the benefit of the commonwealth. The whole Nature is calm; society is characterised by the existence of uninterrupted peace. The turmoil that rolls people from change to change which Mathew Arnold deplores, or the incessant toil which the Lotos Eaters protest, have no place iu Kamban's Kosala. It is not flying the neighbour's contact as the Scholar Gipsy was exhorted to do, nor again the dreamy indolence that the Lotos Eaters coveted, but active service to humanity, Kamban tells us is the royal road to eternal beatitude.

One that runs may not read this in the canto nor could it be maintained that so much is being read into it. The explanation for the divergence lies in this: our poet Kamban is a seer himself

and his treatment of Kosala appears to be a splendid commentary on the recondite words of another great seer Thiruvalluvar. Kural has a chapter wherein is set forth what an ideal country ought to be. Kamban a close student of Kural, takes couplet after couplet, and adopts it to his theme so far as it would suit his conception of it. A detailed examination of this kind would be beyond our scope, but one couplet among them would be in point to our immediate purpose. That couplet declares that a country which yields its produce only in recompense to the labour bestowed on it, is not worth its name; while in a true country its bounties reach the people in effortless spontaneity. It is in accordance with this dictum that Kamban cuts his own path in describing his country and drops altogether all the stages from the ploughing to the reaping. Thiruvalluvar again lays down in his chapter on '*Entertaining guests*' that his land, who eats of what is left after feasting his guests, would yield its produce by itself—even so much as to sow is superfluous. Hospitality then, which is only a popular term for expressing self-less service, is the cause, the effect being adundance of wealth. In the light of these two of Valluvar's couplets it would be intelligible why Kamban keeps our attention constantly invited, sometimes even repeating almost to a fault, either to the material prosperity of the country or the hearty hospitality of her

people and omits a description of the conventional stages of cultivation which the poets, before and after, have made so much of. Strenuosity in any direction would be repugnant to the conception of a country's spontaneous prosperity on the basis of its '**Service.**'

The vision of our poet goes even farther than that of his inspirer. Thiruvalluvar has said that Service is the granary for universal peace and prosperity. Kamban tells us what was the key that was in Kosala which had opened it; that lay with the mistress of the house :—

> *As all the broad-eyed, crescent-browed women were endowed with learning and riches, what else was there to do day after day, than to help the needy supplicants or to extend welcome entertainment to guests.*

Service is possible in Kosala because the women are all cultured and rich. THIRUTHAKA THEVAR, the author of the famous *Chintamani*, and whose depth of perception is excelled only by Kamban, makes his brave warrior Jeevaka, on the eve of his fighting a formidable foe, vow that "If I should lose the battle I shall fall as low as a vile wretch who in fear of his wife discountenances a guest by so much as an unwelcome look." The dominance of an uncharitable housewife, coupled with a consciousness of the meanness of parsimony was probably a feature af Thevar's country that it was possible to provoke an imprecation like this in its hero.

It is due to the difference in education, in its broadest sense, that a wife prevents the husband's exercise of virtue. Without the co-operatian of women, Kamban knew, ancient India had realised, men could scarcely be able to do any good, and women unless imbued with deep learning would not easily appreciate the concept of self-less service as the mission on the earth. The women being rich is also given as a companion reason, for a will without the means would be futile. The ultimate cause of the country's prosperity lies therefore in the learning of the women, as we had shown before that their chastity was the occasion for the seasonal rains. From practical point of view the universal learning of women was the main stay for the blessedness of Kosala.

Kamban opens this chapter with a handsome tribute to his source, VALMIKI. Like all great souls the poet acknowledges a debt where it is due, and like all great minds again he improves upon the material he borrows;—

> *Valmiki, the inimitable composer of the four feet measure, had of yore, with his numbers sweet, feasted the ear of gods; while I, drunk with desire, set out to speak of a land, that had been commemorated by him—even like the essays that the dumb would make at talking.*

This homage to Valmiki bespeaks more modesty than truth. Valmiki mentions Kosala

merely as a country where the city of Ayodhia was, and his fifth and sixth *sargams* treat only of the metropolis. There is no room to extenuate the discrepancy as a case of oversight, for in his next canto devoted to the city, Kamban quotes again in the first stanza, Valmiki's praising it, among its proudest attributes. If Kamban had, on the other hand, expressed his diffidence as describing a land that had not been attempted even by Valmiki it would have been truer, none the less effective for the intended panegyric, while at the same time the magnitude of the task is appreciably enhanced.

Marutham or the land of the agriculturalists, receives the largest attention in the hands of the poet. That is personified as a Queen with all her paraphernalia:—

> *With the dance of peacocks in humid groves, lotus stalks holding the flame of their bloom, clouds rattling like kettle-drums; staring violets for the spectators; crystal waves for the curtain cloth, and with the music of the droning bees, Maiden Marutham sits in state.*

We are told of the fabulous exuberance of things in Kosala at the very outset:—

> *The ridges abound in pearls; the sluices in chanks; the dams in veins of gold; the ditches where buffaloes wallow in wilderness*

of violets; the embankments in coral; paddy-field in swans; jungles adjacent in fresh honey, the beautiful sholas in bees buzzing and gay.

As regards the sounds that prevail in the land they are not the plaintive cries of the miserable or the vehement protests of the oppressed; but says Kamban :—

The dash of the rushing river, the creach of the sugar press; the rythm of the juice's flow; the frothing noise at the chank's mouth in the sea-shore; the din of fighting bulls; the splash of the buffaloes plunging into water; these everywhere and in confusion prevail.

Added to these the whole country is immersed in soft music. The pipe or the tabour, the lute or the harp was in evidence in all the houses, be it the toddy-drawers' or the peasants'.

The small-harped minstrels, having drunk, sing here and there to the harmony of the leather-thonged drums, awaking the maidens of peacock's grace and spotless eyes, who within silver palaces on golden couches, slumber.

That is not all. Those natural sounds or these musical notes would be in particular places but there was a buzzle that obtained every where—**the boisterous hilarity of hospitable homes.**

The whole country is enveloped in an atmosphere of rest and repose :—

The bees and Laxmi rest in lotus flowers; the harlot's eyes and Cupid's shafts on the cool-garlanded lascivious; sea's coral and pearls bright in the great clouds; truth and learning rest in tongues,—(not merely in books).

Then again:—

The conches repose in water; the buffaloes in shade; bees repose among the garlands; Laxmi reposes in the lotus; the turtle near the roots, and the oysters in fords and ferries repose; the swans repose in the corn-stack and the pea-cocks in the grove.

Things that are in a state of wakefulness are however not wanting in Kosala:—

The golden ore turned over as the harrow ploughs; the pearls which the conches yean, the blazing gems on the ridges; the paddy, the green clustered sugar-cane, the beetle, the maiden's faces and the lotus-bloom shine gazing on.

A current of sweetness is infused into the peace and plenty, the harmony and repose all over the land:—

The honeys collecting from the sugar-cane, from the spatha of the palm, from the fruits in the grove, from the dripping hives, and the sprinkling blossoms flow in boundless torrents and reaching the sea where vessels float, feed the fond fishes to satiety.

In a few stanzas spread out in the canto, Kamban tells us what the people of Kosala were doing with themselves :—

Some men celebrate their wedding with the maidens of their heart; some merge their being in music, the science and sense of which accompany each other like the kite and its shadow; some devour with their ears the disquisitions of the learned; here they with exultation receive their guests for a feasting festival; there, are people distributing alms to the deserving. The mothers are feeding their tender babies at their breast. Men are cheering at cock-fights and bull-fights. Somethere are who are employed in commerce, thus augmenting the treasury of the king.

But there is a mixed scene in Kosala which compels special attention :—

> *Where the damsels play at balls, be it the champak grove or the sandal shola, be it the flowery-park or the honey-trickling forest, there the Skanda-like youths study their Arts.*

This, at first sight, would suggest that the students of Kosala were a class of voluptuous vagabonds cultivating with assiduity the company of the fair sex. Indeed, the stanza is so constructed in Tamil that one may avoid, if one likes, the unpleasantness of such a meaning. But if the significance of the thought contained in this is pro-

perly understood there is no occasion for prudery. Valetudinarianism in constitution as well as in reputation is generally the result of the misappreciation of the true value of things. Our poet, great seer as he is, lays here the foundation for the higher ethical and religious life of the people. The future manhood of Kosala watch with glee the graceful poses of the damsels at play. Nay, they do more. They found there an academy for the study of Arts. There in those ball-courts Beauty dances about in visual forms. That is the ground for practical training in the perception of Beauty. Constant sight of Beauty leads to an abiding sense of it. For them music and poetry, painting and dancing, render their meaning in easy effulgence, and a life thus attuned to Beauty declines to entertain a thought, not even so much as a thought of a thought, that would when struck raise a discordant note. All that is ignoble is ugly. Any passion that affects the neighbour is hideous. Any emotion that has relation only to the person who expresses it is not beautiful, even when it evokes pity unmingled with ridicule. Aggressive thoughts of self are debasing. The moral life of the people is therefore shaped on aesthetic basis. But there is a soul. The yearnings of an ardent soul could not rest contented with eschewing all vice and stagnating in a mere moral existence. If whatever morality that obtains in modern society is based mainly on

aesthetic considerations, as is observed by some European writers of eminence, that only shows that beauty has not been sufficiently cultivated in modern society. The growth is stunted. The weeds of self-interest and imperfect notions of evolution have crushed it in their overgrowth, for the unimpeded development of Beauty ought in its very nature lead the soul to the realisation of the highest form of its manifestation, namely, the Creation and the great Spirit that is behind Creation. When that is realised, when religion is established in the soul the Beauty of the Creator is perceived in the Creation and the whole universe turns automatically into an object of love, of veneration, and the self is seen in the universe and the universe in the self. Love then reigns supreme. Altruism born of religion guides the life and ethics becomes religion. This is what we are asked to understand by Kamban, when he makes the fair maids of Kosala the alphabets of Arts.

These and such are the innocent pastimes and the laudable occupations of the Nation. It is remarkable that Kamban enumerates only the temporal activities of the people, and that there is no reference to politics among them is very much to his credit. But what is surprising is that in Kosala nobody seems to be engaged in temple festivities or in performing the obsequies to the departed spirits of the ancestors, and that even in the face of Thiru-

valluvar's having laid down worship of God and worship of the ancestors to be among the primary duties of an honest householder. The reason is difficult to guess. Perhaps, Kamban would acknowledge as the highest form of religion only Service to Humanity and his Utopia is shaped accordingly.

Not alone in man but in the animal world too, there is the same element of cheerful ease of existence. A typical episode from Nature is figured in a stanza where it is said that in the fields

> *The red-webbed swans, having cradled their fledglings in the glorious lotus, stray away practising the carp-eyed maidens' gait; The young swans are fed with the milk which the buffaloes, on the thought of their calves at home, shed; and the green frogs sing them, with their lullaby, to sleep.*

In another stanza we are amused with the innocence of a sparrow which, mistaking for glow-worms, fetches fondly away to illumine its nest the gems that turn over as a cock scratched the earth for prey.

A scene from rustic romance is reproduced by our poet Kamban, which is as instructive as it is amusing:—

> *There being no weeds but in appearance suggested one or the other of the eyes, palm feet, face or the lips of their sweethearts,*

the toddy-mouthed peasants lingered on unable to pluck them up. Would the common-folk ever violate the love they on maidens bestow!

The toddy-mouthed peasants are represented as setting out to weed the fields, but on realising those weeds (violets and lotus) to be the counterparts of one or other of the features of their sweethearts, they hesitate and abandon the weeding altogether. Some digression may not be out of place in connection with this magnificent representation of pastoral love. An attempt had been made in the last chapter to show on two separate occasions what difference in effect it produced when Kamban borrowed an idea from others and when others borrowed an idea from him. Here is an instance which at once would be illustrative of both. Kamban evidently appropriates a picture which appeared in *Jeevaka Chinthamani*. There THIRUTHAKKADEVAR would make his peasants tarry, singing without weeding, for they were reluctant to pluck the lotus or the violet as the one suggested the face and the other the eyes, of their sweethearts, and concludes with an observation that "such is the nature of the agricultural peasants." That Kamban has added some more features that appeal to the peasants is not surely much of an improvement though he elucidates the the eliptical explanation which the CHINTHAMANI

gives to the conduct of the peasants. 'Such is the nature of peasants' leaves THIRUTHAKA DAVAR. Kamban's query however, 'if the common-folk would ever violate love,' can generate a suspicion that the gentle-folk might. Probably, that is so: but we can take it that, at any rate, the cultured gentry may not revere symbols wherever they adore the object, while superstition is a settled factor in rustic life. The peasants are superstitious even in love. The fetishistic instinct in them revolts if only a symbol, metaphorical at that, of their love is to be molested. Kamban's superiority however over his original as well as over his followers rests in his consistent maintenance of this peasant character throughout. Hundreds of stanzas later in *Mithilaikatshi Padalam* and still later in *Gangai Padalam* when weeding is to be done, Kamban makes only the peasant girls do it; while in *Chinthamani*, five stanzas after, one finds the all too sentimental peasants vigorously cutting and mowing away the same violets and lotuses with their stalwart arms when they reap the crops. PARANJOTHI MUNIVAR, who followed Kamban, makes his peasants quarrel with the weedy violets and lotuses for rivalling their mistresses' charms, and they pluck and throw them away with meditated vengeance. This version of the incident loses sight of the essence of pastoral love. Jealousy is the homage

that coquetry renders to real love. True love is all embracing and above rivalry or jealousy. In HARISCHANDRA PURANAM the maidens go out to weed but they could not tamper with the violets or the lotuses because they mirror so much their own eyes and faces. This amount of self-adoration in girls is amusing and certainly in keeping with their innocent nature. But there is a suspicion of bathos in this when we know that the author had, just a few stanzas before, said in a rather aggressive manner that the men had trampled down and crushed the blossoms under the harrow when they ploughed. In those poets, therefore, one end of their romance forgets the other. When we applied the test of logical sequel to their similies we found them wanting: they do not fare better when their incidents are put to test under consistency to pros and cons.

Kamban has prepared the ground for the incarnation of Shri Vishnu. It is a land, then, whose prosperity is as permanent as it is exuberant; a land where the '**Song of the Shirt**' is not wept, nor the '**Cry of Children**' heard; but whose deified altar is Humanity.

THE CITY

CHAPTER III

The City.

SWEET has been the excursion in the country of Kosala and along the inspiring banks of the river Sarayu. Kamban, now invites his audience for a glance round

The grand city of Ayodhia! Melodious poets with pregnant words and sages in Sanskrit have sung its boundless praise. The celestials, dwellers as they are in a land in itself the hope and aspiration of diverse religions on the earth, desire to descend to that city.

A city so eulogised, so coveted! the poet is in ecstasy over his theme. How shall we characterise it! he exclaims:—

The beauty-spot of Mother Earth! Her benign eyes! The sacred string adorning her neck! The jewelled garland on her shining breast! Or, is it Shri Lakshmi's sweet lotus-seat! The golden shrine for

Vishnu's gem! The Heaven of Heavens!
**The all souls' refuge at dooms-day deluge!*

The poet then proceeds to justify his striving at a metaphorical comparison instead of finding an actual parallel in other cities:—

Lo! impelled by ambition to discover a parallel,—when that has not yet been discovered by God Siva who has rendered half His body unto His spouse, not by Karthikeya Lord of two consorts, not by Brahma, patient and rich—the sun and the moon wander unceasingly through space without winking and without rest.

An analysis of Kamban's epithets is tempting. The attributes used in reference to the three unsuccessful divine explorers have about them a pleasantly comic significance. Women are confirmed sight-seers. Siva has His spouse always at his side and Karthikeya has two consorts. The Goddesses should have persuaded their Lords to have gone round the universe many a time and oft. But Brahma's spouse is Saraswathi, the Goddess of learning and scholarship is sedentary. That would be why in the case of Brahma her influence is impliedly negatived, supplying in its place patience and wealth, the indispensable equipments for an earnest

* This idea may need a little elucidation. It has reference to the Indian belief that Maha Vishnu saves the universe with all its life by containing it in his belly at the time of the deluge and floats on the water until the deluge subsides.

traveller. These Gods, therefore, provided as they are with the impetus for exploration, could not have missed Ayodhia's parallel, if at all, one existed in the universe. The folly of the Sun and the Moon is thus brought out in relief. But there is another side. The fond luminaries themselves, would perhaps reinforce their hopes,—valuing a spouse so close to the one, two consorts for the other to entertain eternally, the curiosity-lacking wealth and patience of the third, as handicaps placed on their freedom of movement,—and continue indefatigably in quest of the parallel untrammelled by any such disadvantages. The genius of the Tamil language would admit of reading all this in the stanza. However, if the reading attempted here is flagrantly anthropomorphic, the fault is certainly not of the poet.

Amaravathi, the city of Indra, and Alagai, that of Kubera, would be frequently invoked by the ancient writers in India to supply comparison for their favourite cities. Kamban, however, relegates those standing models to the position of the creator's apprentice exercises in architecture practised only to perfect the construction of this city of golden-mansioned Ayodhia.

Apart from architectural splendours Kamban points out next that the essence of the unique greatness lay in the tranquil ease of existence, nay the unalloyed joy of life, that obtained in

it. Ayodhia is a land of pleasures: and a circumstance in proof of this is adduced in the following two stanzas.

The virtuous enter paradise is the secret of the scriptures. And who did on earth more nobly foster virtues than Raghava! If He, then of immeasurable virtues should have chosen Ayodhia to rule His universe from—how can eternal joy be said to reign elsewhere!

Then again, :—

Lotus-eyed Vishnu—the ultimate refuge of sages who fortified with learning and with virtue subdue their erring senses to attain wisdom and grace, even He, when we know, chose this the scene of His incarnation and sitting in state with His spouse Lakshmi exercised His mighty sway over His great realm for countless years, where then, is in Heavens an Ayodhia's match!

The intending spectator is thus promised at the very outset a glimpse of the Earthly Paradise and it would be interesting, no less profitable, to follow the poet's conception of the Heaven on earth and deduce the fundamental principle on which it is based.

Ayodhia, like any other ancient Indian city is fortified with a stupendous wall running all along its four sides and surrounded with a deep trench. If the city does not admit of a foreign

comparison, so is the height of its walls—they are as high as height itself.

Mountains, they cannot be called, because mountains there are none—all gold, four-square and clad with snow.

But, if compared they must be, Kamban would have you say,

They are like the Vedas in being endless, like the celestials because both enter the Heavens, like the Almighty as they are both impossible for the unfriendly, to approach.

The walls enter the Heavens and Kamban fancies a purpose in it. The very walls of Ayodhia have the virtuoso in them.

The walls take a peep into the Heavens to know if that would be as charming a land as Ayodhia, where damsels with glistening nails like red-tinged moon, feet like lotus, slender waist like vanchi-creeper, shoulders smooth like bamboos, words lisping and sweet dwell in glorious exuberance.

The ramparts are furnished with engines of war.

Angry spears and murderous swords, battle-axe and flaming discs, huge clubs, and thunderous slings—these and such ingenious and innumerable were they, that for a target a fly is not too small nor a kite too far and could with precision blow asunder a boisterous wind or the designing thoughts of an adversary.

But, extensive attention to armaments bespeaks belligerence and a sad lack of faith in righteousness. Nay, there is even an implication of weakness in maintaining such a state. Kamban perceives this and hastens to give an explanation :—

> *Though the sceptre of the renowned emperor reigns supreme over all the quarters of the globe, dispelling darkness like his illustrious ancestor, the sun, the ramparts are raised, not as essential for defence, only as an ornament and to conform with the conventions of the times.*

Kamban then leads us on to the description of the defensive trenches that engirdle the ramparts. Our interest in the obvious and in the commonplace is heightened by his inimitable trick of inverse comparisons. They are arresting. We are compelled more to ponder over the objects invoked in comparison rather than to appraise the matter which by them seeks elucidation. The walls of Ayodhia were vast and well defended, as, of course, any fortress-walls should be. But, what is the function of the similies employed to denote those qualities! One puts us in mind of the magnitude of the Vedas and the other indicates the ways of God to man. This effect of inverse similies is again very well produced in the next stanza where the trenches are described. The trenches, Kamban goes on to say,

Are unfathomable as the purpose of harlots, who measure out a modicum of their charms to the equivalent of gold: muddled as the performances of inferior poets: unassailable as a virgin's virtue: and full of crocodiles whose fastening grip on their prey is as relentess as the hold which sensuous flesh has on the craven souls of men.

The humourous rebuke in the first two, the revered awe inspired in the next, as well as the self searching seriousness involved in the last of these similies engross our attention throwing to shade the aspects of the trench which they ostensibly have come in to compare.

Kamban next employs a figure-of-speech, which may roughly be termed '*delusion*', to emphasise at once the height of the walls and the depth of the trenches.

The ditches are so vast and the ramparts so high that the clouds in the sky mistaking the one for the ocean and the other for a mountain, descend to drink the water of the trench, and climbing with effort on the walls rain profusely away.

The trenches teem with lotus flowers and the poet takes another occasion to pay a splendid compliment to the handsome maidens of Ayodhia. Lotus blooms, he says,

do now marshal their forces in battle array and besiege the citywalls renewing

48212

their vengeful quarrel with Ayodhia's maidens whose charming eyes had put their host to rout before.

We come to the gates of Ayodhia. There are four of them leading into the gorgeous city with stupendous towers over them. The construction of the towers is here set out in rich detail. Golden walls decked with lustrous gems arise above a base of polished stones. Rows of diamond collonade with sapphire cornices and crystal frieze stand on the walls. Beams of burnished silver are then laid on, supporting a huge dome of gold that the edifice viewed as a whole is impressive as a splendid diadem placed on the brows of Queen Earth. The architect presents thus a lavish structure in precious splendour and the sculptors have statued it with life-like marble representations of birds and animals, and our poet in conspiracy with those artists renders it the scene of a fascinating love-episode from natural history. There, says Kamban,

The female dove calls her mate to her side, but turns only to spy him sit, irresponsive to her tender coos, nestling beside a marble-dove, and wings away exasperated to the nearest karpaka grove in the paradise.

The colossal height of the tower made thus manifest by its proximity to paradise is, however, shorter by many steps than the imagination of its describer.

The threshold of Ayodhia is now crossed. Ranks and files of imposing palaces now embrace the vision.

> *They vie one above the other like milk-sea's billows, immaculately white throwing the moon in comparison to swarthiness. The golden pinnacles crowning the marble mansions glow like the blushing cheeks of the snowy Himalayas when kissed by the roseate rays of nascent sun. The banners wing aloft wafling welcome. Wreaths of pearls swing in festoons from flag-staff to flag-staff whose bright spear-heads flash lightning in the azure sky.*

We have a closer view of the buildings. There are thousands and thousands of them all built alike with gold and silver, diamonds and rubies emeralds and sapphires: and such were the palaces, not alone in the main roads, but Kamban adds with a significance,

> *There are no houses even in bye-streets, that are not mansions wrought in gold and precious stones.*

It is not in Kamban to be baffled in speculation as to what would be the cumulative effect of these innumerable glistening castles. 'How' he asks with certainty,

> *How but being enveloped in Ayodhia's reflection has the celestial land become a golden world?*

This no doubt is extravagant. Yet, if extravagance can be redeemed by persisting in it, here is an instance. Several hundreds of stanzas later down, the poet in narrating a pompous procession of Ayodhia's king with all his royal retinue, asserts that the dust that arose under the horses' hoofs, elephants' feet and chariots' wheels ascended to the heavens and settling on the golden world rendered it earthen again.* It rests with Ayodhia, then, to make or mar the land of the gods. Even this, however, dwindles to staleness before a *fact* which Kamban points out next, positively staggering by the demonstrative proof very naively adduced in its support. Says Kamban,

> *The sun is nought else than the focus ring of of multi-jewelled Ayodhia's brightness. Behold, he is weak at rising, brightest at his zenith when closest to the city and weak again when he sets.*

Imagine the sun, the self-luminous source of all light and except for which Ayodhiya's diamonds and gold would perform their offices but poorly, reduced to focal dependence. But, the poet introduces his pet city and pets do frequently spoil their parents. Still, to sneer at bold conceptions of this order as 'oriental exaggeration' is to betray a sorry ignorance—an ignorance that facts and proofs as these have poetic denominations of their own.

Apart from the private mansions Kamban enumerates four classes of public buildings in Ayodhia. They are :—

> *The offices where the chiefs render their tribute to the emperor, the houses of entertainment where swan-like damsels sing and dance, the halls where the hard-of-comprehension scriptures are taught, and the academies where difficult-to-express arts are appreciated.*

The vernacular construction is purposely retained in the translation to denote that the epithets are descriptive and not restrictive in their application. The different attributes used by Kamban as appertaining to the Scriptures and Arts are note-worthy. The Scriptures with all their subtle shades of metaphysics are really hard to comprehend but it is that that is usually lectured upon with complacent conviction by its exponents and very comfortably listened to by the audience. While, however, if either of them are to search themselves in all sincerity as to what exactly is it that the one taught and the other believed to follow, very often both of them find themselves at sea. The case is quite the reverse with the arts. The true value of works of art is beyond the limitations of verbal expressions but is only capable of realization by those attuned to vibrate with beauty by constant familiarity with objects

artistic and beautiful. Here, we have then, in each word a dissertation on ethics and aesthetics.

The magnificence of the metropolis is not however, the conclusive measure of the merit of the country. It is only an indication of its social political and artistic consciousness. The lavish grandeur of mansions or the invulnerable strength of its fortifications is, therefore, in interest subordinate to a proper appreciation of the principle that governs the inner life of the people.

The golden mansions of Ayodhia contain within them beautiful beings—the fair maidens, whose souls in turn are as pure and fair as their looks. Indeed, all that glisters is gold in Ayodhia. The golden caskets do enshrine beings lovely in body and in soul. That is the test for a real civilization —the simplicity, the sincerity, the inside not belying the outside. Apart from the dramatic interest, the intrinsic value of the casket scenes in the *Merchant of Venice* appears to lie in the contrasts they show. Morocco, Arragon and Belmont represent three grades of civilization in, as is erroneously believed to be, their progressive order. But the civilization that is now advancing — though not advocated on these lines — is a carnival of selfishness, of corruption and of that 'homage which vice pays to virtue' namely, hypocrisy. Its staunchest exponents cannot deny that the higher a people has

ascended the rungs of modern civilization, the more familiar they are with corruption. The father of Portia,—if one may be allowed to divine the intentions of an absent character in the play—intended, by the whimsical ordeal, to ensure for his daughter not so much a sagacious husband but one who belonged to the same state of civilization as herself. The Prince of Morocco is unacquainted with deception. The simple logic of Fezian civilization that beautiful things should contain beautiful things could not avail in Belmont. Relatively speaking, Morocco was in a state of nature. Arragon roughly next in degree does not mistrust appearances. But he elects on the basis of his own deserts. Clamorous thoughts of *self* come to the forefront as the determining factor. Personal equation makes its appearance and with it the earliest form of deception has begun, viz., self-deception. But, Bassanio wins because he knows his hollow civilization inside out. He has himself to set or escape a thousand snares to enthrall by outside show. That is Belmont—an hazardous civilization and the world is now wallowing lamentably in the heyday of Pan-Belmontism, but our poet transports us to its Pre-Belmont ages.

The charming womankind of Ayodhia is, in common with their rural sisters, surpassingly angelic in beauty. It is to institute a comparison between them and the fairies in Heaven, wholly to the advantage of the former, Kamban, we

saw before, fancied the rampart-walls were rising to the skies. The lotus blossoms in the trenches, we also witnessed, were smarting under the defeat which Ayodhia's maidens inflicted on them in point of charms. Their irradiant complexion is an added source of illumination to a city, otherwise by no means dark. If the painted pictures did not wink, the poet whispers, it was because they were

> *Ambitious to assimilate with uninterrupted vision the whole beauty, the damsels were endowed with.*

Blessed are the mansions to inherit such divine damsels. Blessed still are its spacious halls to resound with the clinking voice of their golden anklets. It was, however, left to PUKALLENDI, an eminent poet and the writer of the metrical story of Nala, to interpret the anklets' rattle as :—

> *The plaintive murmers muttered at the feet of their mistress imploring her to desist from moving about lest her wiry waist should sometime fail in bearing her surging, though tender, breasts.*

Long arms, generously long, depending from sinewy shoulders, broad chest indicative both of physical prowess and the largeness of the heart which it encloses, and a majestic deportment characterise the manhood of Ayodhia. Richly accoutred and with honey-rilling pollen-spraying wreaths of fresh flowers dangling on their necks, the youths in the city are seen to ride forward and backward

lusty elephants, gem-spangled chariots and swift-hoofed horses. Archery they learn and charity they practise.

The atmosphere, such men and women live in, is one infused with the sweet fragrance of the scented fumes of burnt incense. Mellow music mingles with the balmy breath and the poet enumerates the sweet notes that rise to compose this abiding harmony. They are, in addition to the wind and stringed instruments,

> *The pleasant prattle of the lasses, the lisping words of the damsels, vying this with reeds and that with lyres; the maidens' warbling voice itself an enchanting song; and the drowsy carolls of half-drunk ministrels.*

Life in Ayodia is transmuted into a perennial persuit of arts and happiness. "Joy and feast midnight shout and revelry, tipsy dance and jollity" are forever welcome there yet without the odium, this invitation has gathered in the mouths of Comus and his crew. Wine, women and laughter are called forth in Ayodhia as intensely as ever Byron could have wished. What else have we there than an ancient edition of Monte Carlo when Kamban narrates that

> *Some maidens ramble round with gazelle's grace in flowery parks: with gallants of their heart they then repair to fountain baths and next drinking deep their coral lips to paleness fall to fervent gambling.*

Music-halls there were in Ayodhia with all their concomitants:—

> *The damsels dance on the stage: their dark looks darting askance distress the amorous youths, whose life thereon pines away like the dancer's waist—but desire looming large all the time.*

The following scene should have been in open circus as it admits of mounted spectators:—

> *Songstresses of sweet sixteen sing footing it featly and the horses scan the measure with the string of little bells swung around their necks.*

Stony walls, painted pictures and restive horses are all adept connoisseurs of art in Ayodhia. The youths on the backs of those horses admire the singer as much as her song and evidence their appreciation in a more substantial form:—

> *As the songstress sings an arch-smile beams in her countenance, throwing the languishing youths to untold distress: and the pearly laurels which they in admiration heap on the damsel's shoulders squeeze her thin waist thinner.*

One can never dwell too long in Ayodhia. There is one other side of its life, the sexual-side, which if suppressed, would but leave the picture incomplete. It is the unique feature of Tamil literature that it has a regular grammar of love written with all its rules and illustrations and God Siva

himself is believed to be love's earliest grammarian. Every thought, every word and every action from the meeting of lovers to the day of marriage and even after—for the man and woman in this grammar do not cease to be sweethearts once they have become husband and wife—has been analysed and exhaustive treatises written upon. There is one phase of love's regime known as *oodel* which can be in a way translated as 'wanton quarrel'. Perhaps traces of this oodel in the West are found in Cleopatra's melancholic reflexions

Oh! the dalliance and the wit
The flattery and the *strife*

as she mutters with intense pathos in Alfred Tennyson's dream of the never-more-to-be days with her Roman Bacchus. Her more modest sisters in Tamil literature did also cultivate that *strife* as an institution. It is always one sided and the woman starts it, as did the female pigeon on the tower. The occasion for the quarrel would be unfounded jealousy, often fanciful, but the demonstration of anger on the part of the woman shows no lack of vehemence. The ardent lover comes as usual to his ladylove but he finds her cold and her countenance frigid. The love-lorn gallant is bewildered yet he does not presume to enquire the reason for the change. He only sets about propitiating her. The show does not last very long however. Though she ruthlessly repulses his overtures for a time, she melts before

his obsequious apologies and earnest promises of making amends for a lapse he has no notion of. Fictive tears she sheds, which have only to be kissed into peace. It is believed that this estrangement is a precursor of enhanced felicities after reconciliation.

This oodel aspect of love in Ayodhia is portrayed in a stanza or two in the canto. One stanza laughs

> *at the strong shoulders of the gallant youths looking flushed with kicks received from the embellished lotus-like feet of comely maidens.*

Love's license that! But it is hoped, in justice to womanliness, the flush is due to the imprint of the crimson-painted foot rather than the violence of the impact.

An interesting event belonging to this class is narrated in another:—

> *The lady sits morose with indignation: the eager lover comes frolicking to garland her but she in contempt flings the wreath away into the street, where it trips the horses entwining about their legs. The quarrel, however, is ultimately quarrelled away and the fond lovers in dalliance shower sandal-paste on each other profusely, which again flows into the street and slips the pedestrians there.*

Either way, the poet lets us infer that the scenes of the love-chamber are a source of annoyance to

the passers-by, riding or walking, in the streets. Indeed, love scenes are invariably irksome to those who are not themselves the actors.

We have gone round the city. One thing is plain. The people of Kosala do not feel that pleasures are forbidden and quite properly so. Every stage and every walk of life has its own *Dharma*. Salvation comes out of adhering to that Dharma. This is among the eternal teachings of the great *Bhagavath-Gita*. One need not lash oneself into salvation. Senses, at one stage of evolution have to be controlled and not exterminated. Flesh can have its share provided it does not gormandize the spirit.

Almost all, that Ayodhia can show, have been seen, but the canto draws to end drawing our pointed attention to two things that are in the city conspicuous by their absence—alms and police: alms, because, all being endowed with all the riches, there is no recipient: police, because, there is no crime. No gaping kikshaw this! Kamban is serious. The modern world may perhaps be induced to believe that begging can be made impossible by putting an extra bolt on the alms-gate. Yet, even those who are inclined to allow that *crime and police* is a fugitive problem in cause and effect hesitate to admit that society is possible without a police to safegaurd it. We have only to turn to the annals of ancient India and even in the early centuries of the Christian era we learn through

the records of Fa Hien that Indian doors had no fastenings and robbery on the highway was unknown. Fa Hien was no hysterical traveller. The Chinese pilgrim can be relied upon when he records with exultation that he had not been robbed once in India and that he had not seen a policeman.

The excellences of Kosala are not isolated achievements. They are universal. Extreme equality of conditions, and of the highest level, prevails in the country. When men are all equal the spirit of the nation is democratic and the outstanding feature of its physiognomy is a tender desire for well-being. The seductive tranquility of Kosala has been repeatedly emphasised and the equality in point of wealth has also been corroborated by the uniform grandeur of its dwellings. Kamban, however, does not leave the spirit of the nation to the mere chances of an inference. He sets down in the closing portions of the canto in explicit terms that

> *As all possess all the great fortunes in equal degree there is none poor none rich.*

The modern conception of democracy involves, if not absolutely based upon, this equality of fortunes, and a democratic civilization is the progress made by society in the attainment of the maximum quantity of physical happiness by a most equitable division of the fruits of soil and labour. Even supposing everything that is claimed

in this direction is achieved, if that were the be-all and end-all of progress the human species is reduced to a mere ant-hill. But genius dreads ant-hills. It declines to congratulate a polity that flourishes none but its ant-hill results. Genius would not have "what is fine within thee growing coarse to sympathize with clay." Genius, though it may not exactly require that the useful shall be subordinate to the beautiful it certainly demands that the useful shall be beautiful. Every stanza in this canto renders expressly or by implication a vision of a community at once happy and beautiful. Kamban has not lost sight of the dectrine of utilitarianism and relies also on the principle of equality to guarantee the happines but he does not trust absolutely the destribution of wealth and work alone to secure the desired end: and we can see to-day History amply supports his scepticism. He is not interested in the concerted actions of society in cornering trade or colonising abroad, not certainly in ameliorating the conditions of a class caste or craft. But, he would tell us that

All all in Ayodhia without one exception
are ever learning: hence no one there can
be called learned and no one not.

Kamban places, therefore, the equality of the people on the universal proficiency of learning, of knowledge, of art, of the culture of the intellect. Men are all equal in the realms of Beauty. Ayodhia

is not to be an ant-hill. Amidst all its material gratifications the soul is equipped to a higher and nobler destiny. Eternity is not sacrificed for the comforts of a day, nor has *now* been left, unlike Browning's grammarian, for dogs and apes in expectation of forever. Taking the conclusions alone of thoughtful political philosophers, without pausing to investigate the psychology of them, man in the present democracies becomes self-centred and gets to entertain exaggerated notions of himself. The voice of the Everlasting is then drowned in the hurry-scurry of the workaday world. The great seer-poet percives this and builds his nation not on the equality of wealth but on the equality of Truth.

That then is the kernal of Kosala's blessedness. Without the light of Truth the world gropes in darkness. To a man in the dark chamber, however beautifully it may be furnished, nothing else is palpable except himself. He is thrown upon himself. One foot trips the other. Doubts and fears denizen the darkness. His sense of direction is confused. Equilibrium is lost. The way out may be open all the time but he does not perceive it. It is, therefore, that the mental darkness breeds egotism, and suspicion and fear and doubt and passions and prejudices crowd in its train. To an egotist, amusements are not objects of enjoyment but only vapid contrivances for escaping from himself. When the light of learning dawns

and the eternal verities realized, *self* is effaced and all the harrowing incidents of selfishness dispelled. In Kosala all are equal because all are students of Truth—what their rudiments of learning were we saw in the previous chapter. In the words of *Kural*, magnificient in its simplicity "Logic and letters are the two eyes : only those who are learned can be deemed to possess eyes, the rest have only two ulcers on their face." Eyes do not certainly perform their function when they do not see the Truth.

The most significant stanza in the whole of this canto is the last one. It is in the form of an allegory and explains as it recapulates all that went before. Kamban calls Ayodhia a delicious fruit reared for the benefit of the people. He tells us how that tree which bears the fruit, is constituted,

> *Learning is the seed: knowledge is the strong primary-trunk put forth: refreshing foliage of non-violence spreads: charity for buds sets in: the full-blown blossom is righteousness which ripens to fruition—to paradise.*

Ayodhia is a thing of beauty is a joy forever.

THE KING

CHAPTER IV

The King.

A KING does not govern his state—he serves it: this possesses the merits of an aphorism not alone in stating, but even in that its principle is so ardently admired but so slovenly followed. Great kings are made when, in adminstering their kingdom, their blazing beacon is love, and their constant watchword service. We have, in the fourth canto the delineation of a great sovereign of lands by a great sovereign of letters.

Dasaratha was, at the opening of the epic, the king of Kosala. He had the righteous sway of all the seven worlds but his great fortune, Kamban tells us, consisted in that he was ordained to usher Rama, the hero of the story, into this world: and it may be added in passing that the greater fortune of the father and the son alike lies in their having been commomerated by that poet.

One would expect that in introducing the King to the readers his ancestry would be traced, his

palace described, the throne, the sceptre and such other paraphernalia of his state set out in glowing colours. Kamban is very eloquently silent on them. The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power, the emblems of authority, may constitute a monarch but would not in themselves build up his fame or form a substitute for his regal functions. Indeed prestige starts its parade exactly when the functions are forgotten. Dasaratha knew his functions. He had in the fullest measure all the qualities which make a great King—wisdom, clemency, virtue, equanimity and valour. There was scarcely an austerity pertaining to a King which he had not performed many times over, and there was none who asking him for anything asked in vain. And how did this king fulfill his functions? He was for all,

> *A mother in affection, their virtueous deeds in bringing prosperity, *a son in paving the way to Heaven, if a pain also the balm, and their keen intelligence in search after knowledge,*

Dasaratha serves the people as a mother serves her child, as good deeds serve the doer, as a son serves his parents, as intelligence serves study—all these he was for *all*, for humanity, not only for his immediate subjects. Great kings feel that they are men first and kings after. Greatness

* This has reference to the Hindu religious belief that no man can enter the gates of Heaven if he has not a son born.

will not limit itself. Its outlook as well as its usefullness will be all-embracing. The whole world then, not merely the dominion actually under his sway, was the sphere of Dasaratha's service, and the scheme of this stanza is to formulate the extent of as well as the directions in which those services were rendered. Each life fully lived should have, according to its Indian values, achieved its fourfold purposes, which are the attainment of Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. The words are Sanskrit and in Tamil writings they are referred to as Arram, Porul, Inbam and Veedu. It is not possible to find their equivalent words in English to connote all that they signify. Perhaps Virtue, Wealth, Delight and Heaven would be their nearest translation: and for a definition we can do no better than quote the succinct verse of Avvai, the venerable old poetess of Southern India, that epitomizes within the compass of a four lines all the philosophical import and the practical application involved in them:—

> *Charity is virtue: That which is acquired through none but fair means, wealth: The conjugal felicity, free from blame, of a loving husband and wife, delight: Heaven is the renunciation of all the aforesaid three.*

Kamban follows the definitions of Avvai and translates them, with reference to the king's services, in the terms of the closest of a man's

relations the parent, the progeny and the better-half. The virtue of virtues is charity, and love being the mainspring of all virtues, the monarch is said to lead the people with a mother's love in the ways of virtue. It is the unique feature of Hindu conception that Salvation is not obtained by good actions but only by non-action.* If evil is irresistible to the evil-doers it is as much arduous, perhaps even more, for those of virtueous proclivities to desist from practising good, and thus the virtueous though farthest from hell are no nearer to Heaven, unless they have achieved absolute renunciation of good and bad alike. One's son is a very natural aid to one's renunciation. Renunciation becomes facile when one finds that there is another who would continue the virtues of one's homestead. Each man, in a more than biological sense, is reborn in his son and repeats his cycle, that the doubling of the self in a way halves the pangs of extricating from the trammels of the world. Dasaratha then helped each man to gain his salvation, and in this he was to each like a son. If Avvai's definition, Kamban's comparison and our explanation are correct, the Hindu shastras which deny salvation to the childless would be no superstition but bare psychology.

* Non-action does not involve the negation of all actions, but implies in the doer a state of mind which does not concern itself with the nature or the consequences of his deeds, provided, of course, that it is his Dharma to do them.

Kamban, like Shakespeare, is a consummate conjurer with words. The expression 'if a pain also the balm' affords, while advancing the similitude, an exquisite instance of it. In conformity with Avvai's defenition the king ought to be compared to a wife in obtaining delight and happiness to the people. Now, Good Taste, ruffled at conceiving of a monarch, even in patent metaphor, as everyman's wife, would cry halt, and many a one less adroit would have halted or braved it rashly and offended against Art. But Kamban conforms to Avvai and concealing the implication in the words of her illustrious brother Thiruvalluvar glides gently past any outrage on propriety or taste. Thiruvalluvar has a section in his Kural devoted to 'Kama', and there he propounds a conundrum that carries its own solution. "What is it that is a disease and its own drug ?" he asks; answer:—woman. No doubt the reference is to the love-sickness induced by woman and cured by herself. Unequivocal proofs of Kamban's allegiance to Kural abound in the Ramayanam and the expression 'if a pain also the balm' is only that erotic riddle of Valluvar re-stated in different words, while the poet relying upon his reader's erudition in classics leaves its solution latent and Taste in good humour. Wealth or prosperity, strictly speaking, is only Dharma's reward for one's meritorious deeds and it does not lie with any relation to confer on another

wealth that will last or prosperity that is real. So, with Avvai's guidance, Dasaratha has been compared, in that respect, to one's good actions and not to any relation. On the top of all these it is significant that the poet, on his own account, places intelligence or the faculty for culture—the key to the intellectual and the moral elevation of the nation: and a king is nothing if he is not that.

A polity gets complicated as the ralative positions of the rulers and the ruled come to be contested. When the subject contemplates his rights or the king his dues, the harmony of the state is destroyed and there scarcely remains anything else in life but to hold up death as its issue throughout. Merry England under the Tudors and the Stuarts kept the scaffold in full swing and the executioner the busiest official in the kingdom. If the people, with Cromwell for their champion, taught their sovereign, in the inimitable words of old Boswell, 'that he too had a joint in his neck', it was only because of the constant remindings they had of their own. In modern Europe necks may not get out of joint as between a king and his subject: but that is small mercy, for, the issue continues to be the same in its economic, industrial or international aspects. The ruler has become almost impersonal and takes now the name of vested interests. Indeed Carlyle deserves congratulation for having lived in

an age that it was possible for him to 'esteem it a modern error, That all goes by self interest and the checking and balancing of greedy knaveries.' Subject to very stringent reservations Carlyle may still be right in his estimate, and if so much is allowed it would be to save the face of irredeemable misauthropy.

An exclusive interest on the one part is exactly to the detriment of a similar interest on the other. Constitutions may change, parties may rise and fall, wars may be lost or won but the governing spirit remains unaltered with the result that the contest subsists, never prevailing and never subdued. Often do the interests clash perceptibly when it is ferocious, but if the differences in interest exist and one side is mute it is pathetic. Rulers of men are sometimes likened to shepherds. The protection which a shepherd bestows on his flock with vigilance and care is ultimately to enure for the benefit of the former; for, what is the sequel to a fattened flock! This simile from the meadows is therefore misleading and best forgotten. There was no shepherd-and-flock compact in Kosala. There was no duality of interests. To say even that there was a mutuality will not be accurate. There was a merger. It was one entity. The central stanza in the canto renders this idea in an admirable manner, where the poet says:-

As the king regards every life his own
he is even the body wherein all the lives,
animal and plant, in peace abide.

This was how the invidiousness of *meum et tuum* stood obliterated in Kamban's Kosala. Of the body and soul that go to compose a personal entity the ruler was only the body, the soul being the lives said, in common parlance, to be under his sway. The soul keeps the body from decay but it is not there for that purpose. The soul is there for the purpose of working out its own salvation and the body enters into no kind of stipulation with the soul as a return for giving it the facilities of an abode. The body is merely in the nature of, what in the language of chemistry would be called, a catalytic agent. The life, however, is not without its affinity to the body. The sentiment is reciprocal and the relationship purely platonic. It should be useful to remember that king Dasaratha as depicted here is not by any means the invention of a poet in exercise of his function as a delineator of ideals or the exaggeration of a critic in excess of his privilege. India's tradition is all that way. Every page in her history every line in her classics every tale in her folk-lore is redolent of this spirit in kingship.

Manimekalai is one of the most ancient of the classics in Tamil. It is in story sequel to another great classic *Silappadikaram* which has

been referred to in these pages. The writer of Manimekalai is SATHANAR, the son of a grain merchant. There is an episode narrated in that work whose lesson is as illuminating as the event itself is simple. There lived a blind boy named Sarngalan in Pukar—a glorious city of the past at the mouth of the river Kaveri but now extinct. His father was blind and the love with which his parents cherished him knew no bounds. He was of immense help to his father and one day while returning from an errand he happened to pass through a grave-yard where a demon infesting that place possessed him. Thereon the poor boy ran panting home and laid his devoted head dead at the feet of his mother. Distracted though with grief she felt she had not merited this visitation. She could not reconcile the untimely death of her son with her notions of virtue and justice. She carried the lifeless boy to the burial ground and there invoked Sambamathi the presiding genius of the city. The Goddess appeared and the mother with heart-rending woe implored her to resuscitate her tender Sarngalan. The Goddess shared the grief but pleaded inability and said that a life once separated could not be made to re-inhabit the body it had left. The fond mother insisted upon that being done and offered her own life in exchange for that of her son. "Yet," said Sambamathi, "an exchange could not solve the problem of life and death." The fond mother

still stood sceptic, when the Goddess adduced an argument as the last word on the subject. "Here you see hundreds of tombs raised on kings who ruled and died." "Yes" nodded the mother, "Then," asked the Goddess, "if lives can be substituted how could any king have died? Would not man after man have given his life to keep the king ever alive ?" The question is asked in the classic in the form that carries its answer. It is needless to add that the bereaved woman resigned herself to fate.

48217